

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Fort Pillow State Historic Park's Chickasaw Bluff Trail

By Fran Wallas

**F**ort Pillow State Historic Park's linear 4.8-mile round trip Chickasaw Bluff Trail in Henning makes either a great winter day hike or an easy overnight backpacking trip.

Fort Pillow was a significant Civil War Battle site.

To start your hike, walk across the road and turn left back towards the park entrance. In about 10 feet, you will see the Chickasaw Bluff Trail sign in an open field on your right. The trail is blazed in blue and is very easy to follow. If you plan to stay overnight, you will need to get a free camping permit at the park visitor center.

As you enter the woods, you will notice the size and variety of trees. Since most of the trees have lost their leaves, this is a good chance to practice using bark patterns to identify the trees. The flakey Shagbark Hickory and the smooth trunks of the Beech are the easy ones to start with. You can also use other clues such as the straight trunks of the Tulip Poplars or the long black pods under the Locusts. The trail is built on the soft loess soil that makes hiking so easy on your feet.

The trail goes up and down sometimes very steeply until you get to the bottomland hardwoods and Horsetails growing along the side of the trail. After a few more steep rises and descents, you will notice a picnic table on the

right. If you are going on an overnight hike, you will want to take a short detour to the picnic table that is actually Campsite 29. This is the last site to fill up all of your water containers.

In about a mile, you will get to the primitive backpacking campsite. There is a grill, benches, and a very clean pit toilet. You may want to set up camp, unload your gear and have a snack.

The next part of the trail is the best part in the winter. You will get views of the Mississippi River. Fort Pillow is on the tightest point, the narrowest curve of the river. The trail follows an old farm road. There are home sites with Daffodils blooming in February. You will see Yucca plants and remains of cemeteries from the 1800s. As the bluff has eroded, many of the home sites and cemeteries have been destroyed. One of the state park ranger houses disappeared over the bluff in the 1980s.

At the end of the designated trail there is a sign that says "trail ends." On the way back, you will have a second chance to notice the very large grapevines on some very large oak trees. You also can slow down and get out your binoculars. The Mississippi Flyway is a one of the best places to observe the migration of many bird species. The park visitor center has handouts with a listing of the birds that have been seen at the park. If you aren't a birder, you may want to use your



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**An overnight backpacking campsite in Fort Pillow State Park. Below: You can see the river traffic on the Mississippi from the Chickasaw Bluffs Trail at Fort Pillow State Park in Henning.**

binoculars to watch the barges and river traffic below. Fort Pillow is a special place historically. You may want to end your hike by going to the visitor center and fort to learn more about this site.

### Directions

Take Highway I-40 to Exit 66/Highway 70 and go toward Brownsville. There are brown Fort Pillow signs that lead you to Highway 19 to Ripley and then to State Highway 51. Turn south on Highway 51 to Henning and then west on Highway 87. Turn right on Highway 207 onto Park Road. Just after you enter the park turn into the large parking lot on your right at the old visitor center that is now closed.

#### Fort Pillow State Historic Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks in [www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes](http://www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes).)



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